

How shall we live?

Homily for September 17, 2021

St Paul's words to St. Timothy today are so timely. He is teaching us something about how we are to live as citizen of a temporal society while being at the same time citizens of heaven,

Our text for today begins with St Paul writing: "teach and urge these duties". Paul is connecting what he is about to say with what he had just written. And what are the words he had previously penned? The first verses of chapter 6 read:

Let all who are under the yoke of slavery regard their masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be blasphemed. ² Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful to them on the ground that they are members of the church; rather they must serve them all the more, since those who benefit by their service are believers and beloved.¹

The principle Paul is establishing has to do with the ordering of society. There is a way that we are to live in relation to those who have a certain authority because of their office. Here St Paul says slaves should regard their earthly masters with honour. Back in chapter 2 of this letter the Apostle said something similar about how we are to view those with civic authority:

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, ² for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. ³ This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior.

Notice that in both of these verses the reason St Paul states the principle of respect for authority is joined to a positive consequence associated with it. So that 1. We may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity, in relation to those who govern us, and 2, the name of the Lord will not be blasphemed because in our daily lives we are honouring those who have a more direct authority.

So this is the background to help us better understand what St. Paul means when he says in today's passage:

Teach and urge these duties. ³ Whoever teaches otherwise and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that is in accordance with godliness, ²

¹ [The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version](#). (1989). (1 Ti 6:1–2). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

² [The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version](#). (1989). (1 Ti 6:2–3). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Here the Apostle is showing that the Christian's respect for those who have a God given authority is in keeping with the sound words of Jesus and he refers back to this idea that it is in accord with godliness.

What sound words of Jesus does he have in mind? Mark 12:17 where the Lord says:

“Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s”.

Will all take to heart and apply this respect for those in authority. Clearly not for he writes next that there are those who are

conceited, understanding nothing, and has a morbid craving for controversy and for disputes about words. From these come envy, dissension, slander, base suspicions,⁵ and wrangling among those who are depraved in mind and bereft of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain³

I think Paul's words here speak into our current crisis with a precision worthy of our reflection. There is a controversial spirit of dissent that is rife in our province that has resulted in the crisis we are in today. Our health care system is maxed out, ICUs with unprecedented numbers of patients. And now here we are back to Mass registrations and locked doors.

As the Apostle urged St Timothy to teach these duties, so I as a priest have the responsibility to do the same. Can I therefore ask each of us to examine our hearts and motives, how am I responding to those who have been entrusted with authority as government and health representatives and officials. Are my attitudes and actions exacerbating the crisis or do I want to work to be part of the resolution?

If I am honest am I interpreting COVID with controversial language of conspiracy or am I asking the Lord to help me cultivate the interior attitude and voice that St Paul expresses at the end of today's reading:

But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness.¹² Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

We are in a fight – but our fight is to be against the terrible virus and not directed towards one another. How can we do this? By cultivating the virtues Paul lists here. Notice he says we are to pursue, that is run after, righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. And we are to fight the good fight by seeking to work with and not against those who are tirelessly serving our society on the front lines to combat the 4th wave and this pernicious delta variant.

May we allow the Holy Spirit to guide us to be good citizens of the temporal land called Alberta, because we are citizens of heaven and our under the loving authority of Jesus.

³ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*](#). (1989). (1 Ti 6:4–5). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

